

# MCC Committee on Women's Concerns report



Report #49, May-June 1983

## Women and the Word: The Interpretive Intrigue

For two days in March, the community at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries gathered to dialogue about what the Bible says concerning women: to examine and define more intentionally our hermeneutics, the principles we use to understand scripture.

Faculty, staff and students—men and women—came together to listen, speak, pray and worship. We came together with an awareness that who we are and what we have experienced help to shape our hermeneutic of all biblical texts, including those dealing with women and men.

Eleven formal presentations were given. The content of this *Report* comes from those presentations. The speeches have been edited and shortened. In addition to those excerpted here, five others were given.

These have been chosen because they speak of both Old Testament and New Testament writings, of the example of Jesus and of Paul. They include both

passages which have traditionally been used to affirm women and our gifts and those which have not.

None of the speakers was told where s/he should come out. It is hoped that the interplay of personal story and biblical exegesis will offer new insights for the way we read and apply scripture.

Presenters were asked to use stories from the Bible, their lives and the situation of women in the Mennonite church today. Stories were chosen because God has been revealed to us in stories of the people of God—in and to particular people in particular circumstances. Also, by telling stories about our lives and how we live with biblical texts, we can get at the heart of the matter and understand better what being a faithful people of God means today.

Each story is a gift and deserves our time and attention. It was with this thought in mind that this issue of *Report* was compiled.—*Jan Lugibihl, compiler of this issue and student at AMBS.*

## Genesis 1-3: A Place to Begin

by Dorothy Yoder Nyce

I personally know no passage of scripture that has impacted us more in our perceptions of who women and men are than Genesis 1-3. That is why I have spent considerable time with it these past ten years. In the process I have repeatedly asked, Why are we where we are in our understandings, behavior, and experience as women and men? To that, a partial answer follows—we are where we are because of how western Christians have interpreted and translated scriptures.

The focus here is the particular story of human creation and disobedience, and the impact of the two on our present experience and story.

During this past decade as I realized that feminist hermeneutics shapes my spirituality—my relating to God and neighbor—I have with diligence explored these important questions:

What are the central threads of biblical truth?

Why have justice and wholeness not been realized through 2,000 years of patriarchal interpretation and leadership?

Must men be threatened by women's acquiring language tools and competence in exegesis, by their bringing female experience to content?

How can we continue to support interpretations that foster barriers and discriminate between women and men? Examples of such injustice include: crediting maleness by saying man was created first; negating femaleness by faulting woman for sinning first; assuming that man's rule over woman was part of created goodness from the beginning.

*continued*

I am particularly indebted to Phyllis Trible for my current outline, having read her important chapters in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* repeatedly.

### Male as Normative

All interpreting and translating of scripture has incorporated the experiential. The initial recording plus canonization process did, too. We know that men have been the primary writers and interpreters of scripture. We have all been oriented to accept *their* experience as appropriate insight.

We have rarely been encouraged to critique the equivalence of male experience with truth. For that, several reasons can be suggested. Maleness has been assumed to be *normative* experience; none other was given serious consideration. Men and women then minimized how pervasively the experiential influenced explanations.

We Protestants, with a tinge of smugness, say we turn to and depend on *scripture alone* for our understandings. In that, we fool mostly ourselves. We deny the blatant male influence on scriptural interpretation. We conceal how enmeshed *male* word/experience/understanding is with *God's* word. What we presume to be *God's* truth is in fact colored by the experience and the world view of those exegeting. That experience and world view have been permeated in patriarchy, "the rule of the fathers."

Sixteenth century reformers maintained that rule. They failed to counter the prevailing male ownership or rule mentality perpetuated naturally by church fathers within patriarchy. Much of our congregational, structural, institutional leadership today depends on understandings from bishops or bishop "figures".

In that neglect, a core of being created was minimized. What alternative components, then, do I find in biblical creation materials?

### Created Goodness Expressed

Created goodness for humanity found expression in the unity, loyalty, and solidarity of relationship unmarred by discrepancy, unconfined to physical being.

Created goodness for woman and man found expression in their mutual work.

Created goodness found expression in the two *together* reflecting the dominion or responsible care of the Creator.

Created goodness found expression in sexuality, the intercommunion of woman and man within the breadth of being.

I am persuaded that we have socialized scripture to verify the inequities we wish to perpetuate, the inequities inherent in "father rule." We have, I think, been culturally socialized rather than authentically biblical. Could this have been different? And can we redeem our understandings, and therefore our practice? I believe the response to both queries is an unequivocal **yes**.

### Choosing to Admit...

If we would choose to admit that the Hebrew word *ha-adam* means *the human* or person, rather than *man* or a *male name*, we would read: "and then Yahweh God formed *ha-adam*/the person/the human creature." With that we would be free to know that the initial being was not specifically sexual. We could then rejoice that male and female came into being simultaneously (Gen. 1:27; 2:21-22). We could be free to value woman and man equally rather than perpetuate patriarchal dependence on discrepancy.

If we would choose to admit that both woman and man, in their oneness or unity, chose to be disobedient or disloyal to the Creator alone, we could avoid comparatives like "weaker sex," or "that's just how male egos are." Noting common disobedience, we could see the error of blaming the other before personally owning the need to repent.

If we would choose to admit that the Hebrew word *ezer* means strength or *power* and that *kenegdo* could well be translated *equal*, then we could know (as David Freedman noted recently in the *Biblical Archeological Review*) that "woman was created as a power equal to man" instead of a "helper fit for." We could then see how dependent most women and men are on a "rule of the father" mentality where women are controlled by men.

If we would choose to identify the judgments meted following disobedience as *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*, we could counter rather than reinforce them. "I will greatly multiply your pain//in pain you shall eat// For your man is your desire, but he will rule over you" (3:16-17).

From this, we could observe that whereas the woman yearned or reached out for relationship—for the former experience of pleasure and work and unity—the man would not. This *describes* how he could no longer reciprocate. Not part of creative goodness, man assumed control over woman. Patriarchy depends on this perversion of sexuality. As Phyllis Trible summarizes: "The woman is corrupted in becoming a slave, and the man is corrupted in becoming a master."

### Solidarity in Work

If we would choose to admit that the creative goodness of *solidarity in work* was destroyed through sin, when tasks were divided according to sex, we could be free to counter stereotyped tasks. "In pain you will bring forth children" (3:16)..."And Yahweh God sent him forth to serve the earth" (3:24).

Whereas the rule of the fathers—grounded as it is in hierarchy—needs to separate tasks and then value differently the people performing them, we could be persuaded that Jesus redeemed separation by calling us all to one common endeavor—to tell the news of justice and wholeness for all.

And whereas the capacity to reproduce and the command to "fill the earth" (1:22) were essential for *beginnings* of created goodness, we could resist patriarchal definers of sexuality who distort intercourse and

birthing a baby into requirement for woman and sign of completeness.

If we would choose to believe that God created *adam* (collective noun meaning *humanity*) “in the image of God” (1:27), we would critique Paul’s influential statement: “A man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man” (1 Cor. 11:7). But the milieu that verifies male ownership of woman depends on attaching maleness to Divinity while excluding femaleness from comparable worth.

### Jesus’ New Order

Finally, if we would choose to comprehend Jesus’ radical new order, we would see that his foundational or overriding principle of *justice and wholeness for all* absolutely demands the overthrow of patriarchy. It calls for all, instead of some, to equally sacrifice and receive benefits. It commissions all, not just some, to preach the good news of justice. It requires all to turn around—to repent of how we have inadequately modeled redeemed living and to determine to begin anew, starting with how we explain and internalize created goodness.

Comprehending and therefore practicing Jesus’ new order behooves us to tell and assist all to experience an alternative to barriers. But the task will not be easy or pain-free. It will be costly. Jesus modeled that, too.

Often I have pondered: why do I believe there is hope? Who has modeled for me something other than patriarchy? For that part of my story, I choose to focus my parents and feminist theology.

Now I know that the story of human experience is *not* synonymous with marriage, certainly not as marriage is patterned in western society. At the same time, I believe that my father and mother demonstrated factors of creative goodness. And I see how these reflect Created and Redeemed intent, rather than excused fallenness of sin. I wish to make clear that I grew up in an environment of authentic mutuality. Because of that context, I recognize how different the patterns and understandings in relationships are when *not* built on full reciprocity.

---

## Judges 4 and 5 and Proverbs 31: Old Testament Affirmations of Women

by Maryse Nazon

One thing that is very important in my whole struggle is the fact that I am a Black woman. At times I have felt in a double bind. Being Black in America meant a continual struggle to find my own identity, self-image, self-respect in spite of the oppression I felt at times.

Being a woman meant I had to face sexism. I must say sometimes I felt the odds were against me. I had two significant things I had to struggle with—my image as a woman and my image as a Black person....

I have chosen two Old Testament passages that fascinate me. I would like to give a different reading than some of us may be used to.

Such differences compelled me to thoroughly search into the basic Genesis 1-3 content. I had to discover how traditional discriminating norms had been validated through interpretations of scripture. Experience had reinforced an alternative to the traditional. Self-worth in either of my parents was demonstrated in their never doubting that the other’s would be comparably strong and distinct. They were “power equal to each other.” In that was created goodness.

But I observed something fairly different among many church institution leaders. And I experienced how that affected the way women were being trained to perceive themselves, to enter professions including pastoral ministry.

Experience alerted me to see that traditional interpretations of Genesis 1-3 had blinded us to what in fact was there. They excused privilege and control for men at the expense of women. They confused characteristics of sin and fallenness with created intent. Not being encouraged to examine the creation accounts carefully enough, we missed understanding how they in fact critique patriarchy.

Through feminist theology that genuinely cares for both women and men—rather than primarily men, as is inevitable in patriarchy—I have found needed corrective. In that is new insight into the radicalness of Jesus as Liberator. In that is the call for authentic and consistent interpretation of the biblical imperative of justice and wholeness for all.

We have inherited a past; we live in a present anticipating a future. I am willing to believe that if all of us would give serious thought to reconsidering *our* understandings of human creation, *our* assumptions about the follow-up to disobedience, and *our* expectations for redeemed relationships, the church could be different *tomorrow*. For certainly the church is also us.

If we choose to be radical like Jesus, we will begin by rejecting all relationships of dependence and domination.

*Dorothy Yoder Nyce teaches part-time at Goshen College.*

---

In reading the Old Testament, I’ve noticed that, even though we are talking about a very patriarchal context, there are affirmations of women. The first story I’d like to draw attention to is the story of Deborah in Judges 4 and 5.

We don’t have much information about Deborah. We know that she was married, that she was a prophetess and also a judge, and that a judge was one of the highest leadership roles in Israel.

So here she was, sitting under a tree, and people came to her to be told what to do. Then God called her for a special mission. She gave her the responsibility to go to Barak and tell him that he would go and deliver his people—and God would give him the victory

*continued*

Barak answered by saying he would not go unless Deborah went with him. I feel it was pretty courageous for Deborah to say, "Well, I'll go with you, but I want to remind you, you're going to get the victory by the hand of a woman." That woman (we later learned) was Jael, who killed Sisera, the general of the oppressor's army.

So Deborah went to the battlefield and I can picture her with Barak in front of the army, marching on because God was to give them a victory. Not only did she do that, but she also rose to the occasion and gave the command to attack. Israel was victorious and we further learn that the land enjoyed peace for forty years, with Deborah as a judge.

The first time I read that passage I said to myself, "Oh my, what a woman. She's strong, she's courageous, she has some foresight, she's not scared. She just went right in there." This is a powerful image for me.

The second collection of passages is found in Proverbs. Proverbs has both positive and negative images of women. Most of those images are of women as wives and mothers.

I would like to concentrate on the thirty-first chapter, the passage known as the perfect wife. On one side, the perfect wife is viewed only through the eyes of her husband and she's only of value because her husband is valued. He goes to the gates and boasts about how good she is and all the good things she's doing for him.

Nevertheless, I've noticed that she's a good business-woman; she shows good judgment; she is compassionate; she is strong; she is a wise teacher. Even with the

somewhat ambivalent images presented in this passage, I could see some affirmations of women.

What is all this saying to me? My vision for the church can be summarized by two verses from Amos 5, verses 21 and 24: "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies....But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream."

The church should be a community where I can find justice, both as a woman and as a Black person. I haven't found that kind of community very often....

I will conclude by saying that I am committed to valuing my own interpretations of the Bible and the interpretations of other women.

I am committed not to see the Divine as only a white male.

I am committed to look into my own life and see ways in which I've kept agreeing to the oppression of women.

I am committed to looking to new images of the Divine—mainly the Goddess.

I am committed to make effort in my language to be inclusive.

And I will refuse to let anybody oppress me as a woman and as a Black person.

*Maryse Nazon is a senior in the MDiv program at AMBS.*

---

## **Romans 16: Phoebe as Servant Leader**

*by Erland Waltner*

I want you to understand how slowly I have come to recognize some of the issues that are troubling us at the present time.

The problem emerged for me while I was in administration for Mennonite Biblical Seminary, really only a few years ago.

Anne Neufeld was a student here. She was in the preaching class and talked about a sense of call into either missionary or pastoral ministry. I had a great deal of dialogue with her along these lines.

After she had married Ken Rupp, they were called to give co-pastoral leadership in the Pleasant Oaks Mennonite Church at Middlebury, Ind. in 1976. Quite normally, Anne came to me and said, "Will you participate in the ordination service?"

I said, "I'm honored. I would be delighted to do that." And then the thing got publicized and the telephone started to ring.

What did I think I was doing? Had I considered the impact of disobedience to the scripture on the part of an administrator at AMBS? Could I not read the plain word of inspired scripture that women were to be silent

in public functions, they were not to teach, they were not to exercise authority over males? That suddenly called for a crash course in hermeneutics.

It was as I was struggling with a refinement of my own position, a clarification of it, if you please, that I finally had to begin digging and I haven't dug very far yet. That is why there is so much unfinished agenda for me.

That's when I began reading Romans 16. I read:

*I commend to you our sister, Phoebe, a deaconess of the church of Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord as befits the saints and help her in whatever she may require from you for she has been a helper of many and of myself as well. Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I but also all the churches of the gentiles give thanks. Greet also the church in their house.*

Then the passage goes on. There are at least six other women who are named by name in this passage, who are greeted.

What helped me was the way I sensed Paul was speaking about Phoebe and about Prisca or Priscilla and about these other women. He calls Phoebe "sister," and not in a depreciating sense. He speaks of her as *diakonon* which is translated deaconess, but which really is not a female form in the original.

*Diakonos* is the normal word Paul uses to speak of minister. When he says, "By grace I was made a *minister* of Jesus Christ," this is the word he uses. Or when he commands Timothy to do certain things, and says, "You will be a good *minister*," this is the word he uses.

Now, this word has various nuances in the New Testament. It is used as minister. It is used as servant. It is used as deacon or possibly as deaconess, though it does not have a female form.

What was more important to me was the discovery that he also speaks of her as a *prostatis*. Then I noticed how that was rendered in various versions as "succorer," as "helper," as "great helper," as "good friend." But I got a little suspicious. I soon observed that this is the only passage in which this word appears in this form in the New Testament.

I became aware that it came from the verbal system of *prostasso*. I began to recognize that *prostasso* is the other side of the subordination idea. I did a little rechecking on other uses of verbal forms of *prostasso* in the New Testament. It is generally rendered "to command, to give direction."

I also observed that sometimes as a feminine noun it meant that such a person was a "protector, a patroness or a helper." In non-biblical Greek it has even clearer leadership connotations.

I concluded that our image of Phoebe as a submissive and silent deaconess just didn't fit what I was discovering about this New Testament passage. Here was a woman of strength, a person of social status in fact, some kind of leader, either in the secular world or in her relationship to the church of Cenchreae or possibly in both. The package I began to put together is that Phoebe indeed was something like a *servant leader* of the church.

Then there was Prisca or Priscilla. We're a little more familiar with her, the wife of Aquila. We meet her in the book of Acts in Corinth and in Ephesus and here. Presumably, she also comes to Rome.

She is also a woman of importance, possibly of noble background, possibly well-to-do. There is much we don't know about her.

What we do know is that she is often mentioned with her husband and is mentioned first. Then, in a particular passage in Acts 18:26, where there is the encounter with Apollos, we read that "When Priscilla and Aquila

heard him (Apollos), they (plural) took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately." I think that is a very proper way of describing teaching or correcting someone who doesn't have things quite clear. So Aquila and Priscilla *together* are involved in teaching a male.

Add to this the fact that there are at least six other women greeted in this chapter and generally commended for their work in the Lord and I began to ask some questions in response to those being thrown at me.

Why does Paul greet so many women if he really wants them all to be silent? Why does he commend them? Why does he call them co-workers? Why does he seem to speak on this level as he relates to them in his writing?

This didn't answer all my questions about I Corinthians 14 or I Timothy 2. I still have less clarity about those passages than I would like.

But even though Romans 16 doesn't tell us that we ought to ordain women to the ministry, I still felt a release in terms of a biblical passage that allowed me to move ahead.

I began to see Romans 16 as congruous with the basic teaching of Galatians 3:28 about how, in Christ, the barriers now are effectively broken down and we can exercise the gifts that God has given us for mutual benefit and encouragement.

Well, we proceeded with the ordination of Anne Rupp. The sky did not fall in. AMBS has survived. But it has not settled all the questions either for me or for others.

At this point I am most interested in trying to find a better way of communicating, both in our community and beyond our community. Somehow, it seems to me, the decibels have gotten so high that we can't hear each other. Or maybe, to change the image a little, some of us need to turn up the hearing aid just a bit.

My observation over the years is that, in matters where we have these sharp differences, listening is as important as speaking and receiving counsel is as important as giving it.

And where God is allowed to be God and where Jesus is kept at the center of everything and where the Holy Spirit, rather than our human angers, is in control, Shalom happens.

*Erland Waltner is Professor of English Bible at AMBS.*

---

## Matthew 9:19-22

### Waiting to Touch Jesus

by Nancy Lapp

The woman in this story does not tell us how amazing it was that Jesus responded to her as he did. She was considered an unclean person by the religious community. Anyone who touched her or anything that she touched must wash and be unclean until evening.

Being ritually unclean was part of being a woman.

Even normal, healthy women were unclean about two weeks of every month, but to experience this stigma constantly for twelve years was almost unbearable. It must have left her with only a shred of self-respect.

She had hoped to touch Jesus without being noticed. She was mortified when her deed was discovered. She, an unclean woman, had touched Jesus, the Rabbi. She fell before him in humiliation and confessed before everyone her physical condition and her uncleanness.

But Jesus does not recoil nor try to avoid contact with her. In the presence of Jairus, ruler of the synagogue, Jesus disregards scriptural blood taboos. He does not excuse himself so that he can observe the purifying rituals, nor does he indicate that she should go and make herself clean. Does he *want* to call attention to the fact that he does not consider himself contaminated by this unclean woman?

Instead of scolding the woman for her audacity, he speaks tenderly to her, calling her "Daughter," a name he uses for no other woman. Jesus affirms the strength that remains within her, saying, "Your faith has made you whole, go in peace."

Walking around in this story, encountering Jesus and dialoguing with him has been important to me in my journey. I've found myself in this story: a woman waiting to touch Jesus....

I thought there might be some hope in Jesus. He related to women differently than the scriptures. He broke tradition to relate to women as persons, to make them whole.

Again I'm in the story, longing for healing, wanting to be made whole, wanting to touch Jesus. Jesus looks at

me. He's not afraid of my womanness. I'm not unclean to him. He sees me as a person. He looks at me with love and acceptance. He calls me "Daughter" and says, "Go in peace, your faith has made you whole."

The beginning of healing and wholeness took root in my soul. I began to make spaces of silence and solitude in my life and I began to hear the wisdom and the voice of God in the deepest part of my being.

I felt the unconditional love of God, pure grace, as never before. I saw the beauty of my own soul. I discovered that my faith was not grounded in the inerrancy of the scriptures. My security was not in words, but in the Word made flesh.

God made me human, wanted me to be human, wanted me to use my humanness to reach others. I found within myself the Divine, the image of God, the spirit of Christ. And I rejoice that the word gives life even in its imperfection.

The Word is made flesh and dwells among us.

*Nancy Lapp is a Campus Pastor at Goshen College and a student at AMBS in the MDiv program.*

---

## **I Timothy 2:8-15**

### **Working towards Equality**

*by Ed Pries*

I'd like to begin with my own experience. Growing up German-speaking in a German-speaking church with a German Bible, I grew up with term *Mensch*, a generic, non-sexist or unisexual term, which means person. So, in my Bible there weren't as many men as in many of yours.

When I got to junior high, I started reading the English Bible and all of a sudden I noticed that all these people had turned into men.

Inclusive language became an issue for me while I was in the ministry. I wanted to make sure that when I communicated with the people everyone thought they were included.

Part of this desire to make everyone feel included is due to my upbringing. My parents related to me a very equal marriage. They tried to model for us and teach us that in the home, decisions are made jointly.

Joan and I attempted to structure our marriage on equality and mutuality. That included each developing our own gifts, interests and callings within an interdependent marriage relationship.

Then we came to our experience in the ministry. We were both ordained, Joan to the ministry of music and I to the pastoral ministry. Our gifts were affirmed.

When we came to our first annual meeting, I had my first close encounter with I Timothy. One man began attacking Joan. He said Joan was exercising her authority over men because, in leading congregational

singing, she told all the people—including the men—which song to turn to.

One result of that meeting was that the church strongly affirmed us, except for a handful of people. A second result was that women's involvement in church services increased significantly.

I'd like to share with you my approach to the I Timothy passage. When I examine I Timothy again, I find evidence that we've perhaps been reading it wrongly. The passage gives a lot of information as to why Paul said what he did in this particular instance. In addition, I don't believe Paul would contradict his own practices and his other writings so blatantly. So I am entitling my study of this passage: Working Towards Equality.

### **Sociology of Freedom**

I'd like to begin by talking about the sociology of freedom. History has demonstrated again and again that when a group of people has been in bondage and are then given their freedom, a certain percentage will go overboard and frequently even cause a whole new movement to fall into public disrepute.

In Anabaptist history we need only to mention Muenster to recognize what that means. However, many people still judge Anabaptism on the basis of Muenster.

In almost all cases where a positive new freedom has been experienced, something excellent has taken place. The aberration of a small group in no way negates the good of the movement, nor does it suggest that the movement shouldn't have taken place or the new freedom shouldn't have been given.



I want to suggest that this sociology of freedom was a major factor in the early church. Women in the Jewish world weren't worth much more than a piece of property. In some cases, even less.

Against this background, we see that the new church offers freedom in Christ, where both female and male are one in Christ and where both are called to use their gifts and participate in worship.

To understand the radical change that this represents for the women can also help us to appreciate that some might have gone overboard. The I Timothy 2 passage can be understood in this context.

Thus, we hear Paul calling for moderation, sobriety, reason, etc., and we as Mennonites have to always remember Muenster.

### Pray in Every Place

Let us turn more directly to the I Timothy passage. Verse 8 reads:

*I desire then the men to pray in every place, lifting up holy hands without anger and argument.*

Paul begins this passage by linking it to the theme of prayer in the last seven verses.

The emphasis of the first half of this verse is to pray in every place, an admonition which is timeless. A second emphasis is for the men to pray without anger and argument.

Paul continues in verses 9 and 10:

*And likewise women are to adorn themselves in respectable dress with modesty and sobriety, not in plaited hair and gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds as is fitting for women professing worship of God.*

The key in this passage is the word *hosautos*, which is translated "likewise" or "in like manner." The "likewise" ties these verses to the previous verse and indicates that in the same manner as men, women are called to pray in every place.

The difference lies in the problems. Whereas men have the problem of anger and quarreling in the Ephesian church, the problem among the women is that they're apparently using the worship service to call attention to themselves and distracting others from the focus of worship by their manner and attire.

Moving on to verses 11 and 12:

*A woman should (must) learn in silence in all submission. I do not permit a woman to teach, nor to domineer over a man (her husband), but to be in silence.*

This verse is a crucial one in the way it has been wrongly used against women. In light of Paul's statement on prophesying in I Corinthians 11; his emphasis on gifts to all believers with no male/female distinction or restriction in Romans 12, I Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 4; his injunction to women to teach in Titus 3; and his call for women to pray in all places like the men, as noted above, we must seriously ask why the call not to teach?

I think we need to refer back to the sociology of freedom discussed earlier. Apparently this phenomenon was present at Ephesus. Women who were now free to worship with the men—a freedom not previously theirs in the Jewish synagogue—were wanting to teach and some already were involved in teaching:

*Desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions (I Tim. 1:7).*

Obviously they don't know or understand because in Judaism they weren't allowed to be taught or otherwise involved. Thus, we must seriously ask: how can an untaught person teach?

A second element that plays into this is the early form of Jewish Gnostic heresy that was apparently popular in Ephesus at this time. The major focus of the letters to Timothy is to combat this false teaching (I Timothy 1:6-7; 4:1-3; 6:20b). We have evidence that the women of Ephesus played a very prominent role in this false teaching because they are specially mentioned in II Timothy 3:6-7.

The situation we have described fits our sociology of freedom. Some women took their new freedom and went to extremes.

### Learn Before Teaching

In light of untaught women wanting to teach and those women already doing so falling into false teaching, Paul's statement in verses 11 and 12 begins to make some sense. Paul tells Timothy that the women should learn *first* before they teach and not teach at this time.

In verse 11 Paul uses the word *manthaneto*, meaning that a woman should or must learn. It is a specific injunction that women should learn.

The qualifications that the learning should take place in silence and submission are understandable. After all, how much learning can take place if students don't submit to their teachers for a period of time?

In verse 12, Paul says that he is not permitting a woman to teach. We have already said that this is supposed to be the case until verse 11 has been fulfilled.

The second half of verse 12 continues by saying of a woman: "*Nor to have authority over men; she is to keep silent.*"

The word *authentein*, which appears only here in the New Testament and the Septuagint, has a strong meaning referring to a domineering authoritarianism. It is helpful to recognize that the Greek suggests an authoritarian manner of having authority over. Even if we see *authentein* as ruling in a leadership capacity, we realize it is tied to the time element discussed above—in other words, until the women have been taught.

For a woman to domineer a man would contravene the call to be submissive. On the other hand, for any man to domineer a woman, including his wife, would contravene the call for him to be submissive. We find

this call for mutual submission in Ephesians 5:21 which was written to the same church as I Timothy.

We recognize again that neither is called to enforce the submission of the other to him or herself.

Following this injunction not to domineer is another call to silence. This probably indicates that a husband is not meant, but rather the teacher, because in a marriage we need open, two-way communication.

### Creation Order?

Verses 13 and 14 read:

*For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman in having been deceived, fell into transgression.*

Some argue that Paul is now borrowing from his rabbinic training, interpreting the order of creation to lend weight to his argument. The word "for" would be seen, then, as a connecting word to tie into the cause for silence. This interpretation may be true, but it need not necessarily be.

The word "for" can be seen as merely a connecting or a continuing meaning "furthermore" (e.g. I Timothy 2:5). This can aid us in seeing a different, yet very plausible interpretation.

"Adam being formed first, then Eve" could be merely an analogy to the present situation in Ephesus—men are in the church first by the way of teaching, and women are following because they need to be taught. In this way, the reference is to chronological order as opposed to hierarchical order.

Then verse 14, referring to Eve's deception, can also be seen as a very fitting analogy: We said earlier that women were being deceived into following the heresy in Ephesus. Paul could be merely saying that the two compare. In the same way that it was the untaught women of Ephesus who were being deceived, not the men, so Eve was deceived, not Adam.

But even if we understand Paul to be making a case for the woman's deception, we need to also remember his emphases in Romans 6: 12-19, I Corinthians 15: 21-22 and 45-49. There Paul states clearly and unequivocally that sin came into the world through Adam, through the man. No one can honestly suggest that sin originates only with the woman.

### Saved Through Childbearing?

Verse 15:

*But she will be saved through the childbearing, if they (sic) continue in faith and love and holiness, with sobriety.*

The first half of this verse represents one of the more difficult verses in the Bible to interpret and translate. Thus, we have a variety of translations, three of which are: 1) "She will be saved through the childbearing"; 2) "She will be saved through the childbearing or birth of the Child," referring to the birth of Christ; or 3) "She will be kept safe through childbirth."

I will begin my look at verse 15 with the first option. It is difficult to say theologically correctly that a woman will be saved through childbearing. It goes totally

against Paul's "salvation by grace" doctrine.

Evelyn and Frank Stagg point out that there is another way to see salvation. Salvation in the New Testament can refer to anything from recovery from sickness to salvation from sin. Salvation can also simply mean fulfillment as a corrective against the ascetic Gnostic doctrine which despised sex, marriage, childbirth, etc. Whether this is the case here is not clear.

The second translation option refers to the birth of the Child, that is Jesus Christ, and has been chosen by many interpreters. The birth of a child ties women to Jesus, for Jesus was born to a humble young woman.

A second and perhaps more significant point regarding this interpretation is that it fits so well with the second half of the verse. For it is after all Christ, the Child referred to, in whom they are to have faith.

The third option emphasizes the woman being brought safely through childbirth. The difficulty then is in tying it to the second half of the verse which speaks of faith, love and holiness. One has to realize that many Christian women have also died in childbirth.

One can see the rendering in yet another light, however. This refers to a woman's salvation not being in danger in childbirth if she remains in faith, love and holiness, the same condition that holds true for all Christians. This would combat a popular notion in a strand of Judaism that held that a woman's salvation was in danger during childbirth, perhaps because of her ritual uncleanness.

To summarize verse 15, it is not crucial that we definitely choose one interpretation above the other. Even if Paul is explaining the way it is rabbinically in verses 13 and 14, he has still reversed this himself in verse 15.

### Summary

As a conclusion, let me then say that women are to learn first. You are who you are—male or female—according to your gifts, interests, calling and choices, not according to sex.

Our greatest strength is if we work together as male and female in mutual love and cooperation to secure this fulfillment. We need to work together in the church because only then will the church be strong. We need to work toward liberation and mutuality, mutual responsibility. We need to work at equality, interdependence and mutual dependence, not independence.

And we need to use tact and discretion in the way we confront others and the way in which we present our message, for the nature of our presentation will determine our progress.

In order to be heard, we need to listen. We need to work together. We need to challenge and be challenged, but with sensitivity.

Let us work together for salvation as male and female, both exercising our gifts, both representing Christ in the church and to each other.

*Ed Pries is a middler MDiv student at AMBS.*



## Matthew 28:1-10

### Resurrection Narratives

by Mary Schertz

I bring what I have seen, tasted, heard, smelled, felt to this text. There really isn't any other way anyway, is there?

Bringing this person that I am to this text, what happens? What do I make of it?

We read in all three of the synoptic gospels that the good news is given first to women. Not women in the company of men—to **just** women.

The good news is that “he is risen.” The bonds of sin and evil are forever broken in the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

What does it mean that this news that Jesus is alive again is proclaimed first to women? Let me offer some interpretive possibilities.

I would be well within one interpretation (though, of course reversing several key assumptions) to say that obviously what this text means is that women are innately equipped to be the first recipients of the good news. The women, after all, remained close to Jesus in his hard hours longer than the men. That fact proves that women are more faithful generally than men and thus more appropriate bearers of the good news. I *could* interpret thusly, but I won't!

For two reasons: First, Mark's gospel relates that the women “said nothing to any, for they were afraid.” Why didn't the women speak? Because they were human beings with the potential for cowardice as well as courage, disobedience as well as obedience?

Or because they were so stunned and awed by the events which they had witnessed so as to be struck speechless? Either way, Mark speaks to the humanity, the ordinariness of these women.

More importantly, my experience tells me that women are also human, just as human as men. So, I reject an interpretation based on an assumption that any group of people is for any reason superior to any other.

Another interpretation which I think has *some* credibility would claim that Jesus was a feminist and the synoptics are feminist documents. This story proves it. The truth in the statement is, of course, the compatibility of Jesus and the synoptics with some of the feminist claims.

However, to say that Jesus and the synoptics are feminist is an anachronism. I think we need to take seriously the patriarchal context in which our Bible is written. God didn't wait around for a perfect culture in which to become known to humanity—and the revelation reflects its context.

Taking this context seriously means studying the scriptures in their historical setting and studying the scriptures in their contemporary literary setting. Then

we can fully appreciate both the prophetic strand which criticizes the context and recognize the patriarchal coloring of which we need to take account in applying scripture to our lives.

An interpretation which is a variation of this last one but stated somewhat differently, notes that the synoptic gospels are built on surprises and reversals of society's standards and expectations. Of course, the fact that women are the first witnesses to the resurrection follows this pattern. Hasn't Jesus been comparing the kingdom of God to the unexpected all along? I value this interpretation highly.

But my personal favorite is the simplest and perhaps the most demanding in its application. The reason *women* were the first witnesses to the resurrection is because they were there.

Now, they probably didn't just happen to be there. If, as has been suggested, watching over the tomb to be sure the buried one was truly dead was the custom in Palestinian cave burial, then it seems reasonable to expect that this onerous task routinely fell to women.

The point is not that women were the first witnesses to the resurrection, but the fact that the good news was so compelling, so needing to be told, that, in that moment, quibbling about who told it (much less the gender of who told it) would have been utterly unimaginable.

The movement was an essentially pragmatic one. The person who had the news told the news. It was that simple.

So, what about the situation in the churches today? Is the question really the question of whether we can support the ordination of women from the biblical texts? Is not the question really this: what are the demands of the compelling good news in light of the needs of the world around us?

Working from my experience *and* the text I offer these conclusions for your evaluation. First, from my experience: the women in my life are evidence to me that women as well as men are gifted and called to lead the church in renewal. Aborting the gifts of women by denying their expression in the church not only obstructs the flow of the good news in the current situation, but can distance people from the gospel for years.

Then, bringing the text to bear upon experience: in time (and I would stress this point) the barriers we humans construct, such as limiting the ordained ministry to half our people, really should crumble in the face of the urgency of the message with which we are entrusted—He is risen, go tell!

*Mary Schertz is a senior in the MDiv program at AMBS.*

## Resources

Clark, Stephen B. *Man and Woman in Christ*. Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1980. A conservative approach to women's roles, written from a biblical and sociological perspective.

Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schüssler. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. New York: Crossroads, 1983. A study of New Testament passages from a feminist perspective.

Hardesty, Nancy and Letha Scanzoni. *All We're Meant to Be: A Biblical Approach to Women's Liberation*. Waco: Word Books, 1974. A basic guide to the biblical background for women's liberation. Includes a study guide.

Mollenkott, Virginia Ramey. *Women, Men and the Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1977. Deals with biblical interpretation of passages concerning women and our relationship with each other as women and men.

Tetlow, Elisabeth M. *Women and Ministry in the New Testament*. New York: Paulist Press, 1980. Explores the role and ministry of women in Jesus' time and in the early church, as well as their biblical foundations.

Trible, Phyllis. *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978. Careful and extensive exegesis of Old Testament texts from a feminist perspective, giving particular attention to the literary background of the text.

---

## Letters

I really appreciated the March-April *Report* on mysticism. It was very supportive and affirming of my current search to develop my feminine spirituality. But I did not like the article on the "Two Faces of Women: Witch and Mystic" by Donald C. Nugent. Although he used the right terms and language, I felt he turned them around and called mysticism evil and witchcraft.

I had the fear of going back to the Middle Ages and being afraid to express my feminine spirit because of people's ignorance and fear of the unknown. I felt this article was potentially very damaging to women because of its inaccuracies. I felt it taught women to mistrust themselves and each other through fear.

I think Mr. Nugent is afraid of women. He equates women's liberation with gaining the world. This is a worldly idea of domination, which is what Jesus was being tempted to do.

To me, liberation means freedom from oppression. This means coexistence and mutuality, not domination. I did not lose Jesus when I found my liberation. It was Jesus who led me to it. Jesus is against all forms of oppression, including the spiritual oppression that calls women's spirit evil by insinuating that women are the root of sin entering the world.

As for Goddess theology, I have found it to be very healing to identify with God as feminine. I had the privilege to attend a series, "In Search of the Feminine Spirit." Goddess mythology was a tool used. I found it

Swartley, Willard M. *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women*. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1983. A study of four "case issues" in biblical interpretation, to be released in May.

Swidler, Leonard. *Biblical Affirmations of Women*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979. Excellent resource on specific biblical texts set in their context.

## Other Presenters

Other presenters at AMBS's "Women and the Word" conference included Clarence Rempel (on I Corinthians 11:2-16; 14:26-40), Don Wyse (Song of Solomon; I Corinthians 7:1-6 and Ephesians 5:21-33), Claire deBrun (Galatians 3:28), Jacob Enz (Joel 2; Acts 2) and Gertrude Roten (John 4 and 8). Related chapel talks were given by Emma Richards, pastor of Lombard Mennonite Church, Lombard, Ill., and Ivan Kauffmann, general secretary of the Mennonite Church General Board.

## Correction

Several people have written to correct the identification of Morton Kelsey as "a Catholic priest" on page 10 of the March-April *Report*. Kelsey is in fact a member of the Episcopal clergy (even though he does indeed teach at Notre Dame University, a Catholic school). Sorry about that!

---

entirely consistent with my inner knowledge gained through counselling with my pastor several years ago and with what Jesus did on the cross. It really affirmed me.

To me, this is *inclusive* and makes God a Whole Spirit as I am made a whole person. It does not overthrow Christianity and I did not lose a man. Rather, I found a woman who had been devalued and denied before.

My spirituality is not lesser because I do not hold a clerical office. Nor is it more pure and mystical because I suffer. I feel that much of the silent suffering women do is only reinforcement for oppression. This is not virtuous, nor does it "put it to work for me" as Nugent states.

I think Nugent has the wrong idea about suffering and sacrifice. I sacrifice my false self, but I try not to submit my true self to suffering oppression. This erroneous confusion between suffering and sacrifice only serves to perpetuate women's condition. Silent suffering only perpetuates the false goodness of women.

Women cannot be silent about these things anymore. I cannot be silent about this article. I found it inaccurate and mistrusting. Women's spirituality is not to be denigrated and feared. It is to be accepted with open arms as an enrichment to the church.—Marilyn Yoder, Elkhart, Ind.

I was very disappointed that you chose to print the article by Donald Christopher Nugent in your last issue.

He is sadly misinformed about witchcraft and, at best, unknowledgeable about female spirituality. I fear the effect of such an article on women who are beginning to explore a spirituality not dictated by male fear of the female. The author is somewhat clever about concealing his fear of female spirituality—clever enough that women may make *his* fear *their* fear. We've had enough of that!—*Ann Schertz, Goshen, Ind.*

I was very disturbed by the lead article, "Two Faces of Women: Witch and Mystic," by Donald Christopher Nugent in the March-April issue of the *Report*. My response was one of anger, fear and sadness. Anger at the evident denigration of women's search for spirituality, fear at the effect of such an article on both women and the church, and sadness that a publication for women would print this article.

A major assumption I consider dangerous is the association of witchcraft and evil or even Satan worship. Nugent takes this to the extreme by polarizing witchcraft and mysticism. They are not opposites. I realize many people believe the myth that witches worship the devil and perform perverted rituals, but this myth holds no more truth than the stories told by the Romans about the early Christians being cannibals because they ate the body and drank the blood of Christ.

The almost amusing paradox is that witches have no concept of a personified devil. They worship the God/Goddess immanent in us and in the world, a helpful concept to women who need to find power within themselves. We are beginning to learn to treat other major religions with respect; we also need to be informed about another religion before passing judgment on it as evil. The danger of an assumption that witchcraft is evil is its connection with women's spirituality. We have already seen an example of this danger in the witch burnings of the Middle Ages.

Nugent also distorts the intent of feminists who speak of the Goddess as an important element in worship. Feminists who talk about the Goddess are not necessarily throwing out Jesus, although some may choose to do so. One does not automatically exclude the other....

I realize also that some women are choosing to leave Christianity, at least for a time, and I think it is something one must understand and expect after the oppression women have experienced under the patriarchal rule of Christianity. This is a search for an owned spirituality away from the imposed restrictions and sexism of the church. Women need space to be able to

sort out how feminism and spirituality fit together and what spirituality is as defined by women. It may be that women's search and redefinition of spiritual life will be a great gift to the church.

I could continue—there is much more to be said—but I will end with a response to the parting moral: "What does it profit a woman to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of her man? Especially if he is the Son of God?"

My first question is what is meant by "gain the whole world?" Women need to gain the whole world in the sense of sharing it equally and in the sense of gaining themselves, their world. Another way to see the moral is: What does it profit a woman to keep her man if she must suffer the loss of her very self, her deepest inner being?—*Brenda Stoltzfus, Elkhart, Ind.*

In two regards I was disappointed with your issue on sexuality (July-August 1982): 1) the material largely spread out *what* must be dealt with, not *how* to deal with it; 2) the topics that were handled bypassed many realities of our present culture. The world that my daughters are growing up in is foreign to the one of my generational roots. Much more distant is the historical context of the Bible. What truths in the Word and from discerning believers apply to a teen defining her/his sexuality? Is this too threatening so that it is glossed over for the safe subject of marital intimacy? Let us seek quality wisdom together.

All *Reports* are very revealing about middle class North American Mennonite women, and through some presentations I have known both grace and healing. Thanks for all the effort.—*Ruth Hoover Seitz, Harrisburg, Pa.*

I would like my name removed from your mailing list for the present time.

Several months ago I had the privilege of contributing to "Women's Concerns Report". I researched to make sure my contribution was Biblical and therefore would provide authoritative guidelines, based on Scripture for others to follow.

Many issues, since that time, have presented views based on society's standards with little or no reference to Scripture and God's viewpoint.

My suggestion is that what is printed be researched from Scripture to give women a solid Biblical foundation on which to base their attitudes and actions as we live in this society.

Thank you sincerely,  
*Dianne Doty*

---

## News and Verbs

Malinda Nikkel, Newton, KS, was a retreat leader on "The Positive Single Life" at Rock Springs Ranch, Junction City, KS, March 18 and 19. Topics for the four sessions were—Single: Satisfied; Single: Sexual; Single: Spiritual; and Single: Serving.

We note belatedly the deaths of two Goshen College faculty members—**Sara Kreider Hartzler**, 39 (associate

professor of English) on November 8, 1982; and **Alta G. Hertzler**, 45 (assistant professor of art) on December 3, 1982, both from cancer. **Emma Hartzler**, Goshen, Ind. writes that to Sara's "credits should be added gracious daughter-in-law above and beyond the call of duty."

MCC has just released a 25-minute filmstrip entitled "The Bases of our Fears." Written by **Pat Hostetter Martin** and with pictures taken by Blair Seitz, the

filmstrip examines the effect of U.S. military bases on local communities in the Philippines. It particularly focuses on the devastating impact of the bases' presence on Filipino women and children. Accompanied by a soundtrack and study guide, the filmstrip is available from all MCC offices in Canada and the U.S.

A statement allowing congregations to call women as pastors was approved (70% affirmative) by delegates at a special session of the Ohio Conference of the Mennonite Church on November 13, 1982. This was the culmination of three years of study and discussion.

The 1983 "Resource Listing of Mennonite Women" includes 186 women who are offering their talents, gifts and expertise in a wide variety of areas, such as counseling, retreat and seminar leadership, education, family life, writing, peace and justice issues, women's issues, business, creative arts, third world concerns, and church-related boards and committees. Copies of the listing are available free from: MCC Committee on Women's Concerns, Akron, PA 17501.

**Marian Franz** spends at least two days a week visiting Representatives and Congressional staff on behalf of the World Peace Tax Fund, a bill which would provide a

legal alternative for conscientious objectors in the U.S. to the payment of taxes for military purposes. Marian is executive director for the national campaign for passage of the bill, based in Washington, D.C. **Edith Adamson**, Victoria, B.C. coordinates the Canadian Peace Tax Fund Committee, which is planning a test case of the new constitution's provision for "freedom of conscience" as it relates to paying taxes for defence spending.

**Anna Bowman**, Goshen, Ind. shared concerns about sexism and the church at the December 4, 1982 Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference Justice, Peace and Service Commission meeting.

Over 500 women attended "The Challenge of Serving" retreat March 4-6 at Iowa Mennonite School. Sponsored by the WMSC of the Mennonite Church, the retreat brought together women from the Illinois, Indiana-Michigan, and Iowa-Nebraska conferences. **Jean Alliman**, Hesston, KS, developed the theme in her three messages. Seven workshops were offered including "Anger and Hostility" (led by **Vel Shearer** of Wilkes-Barre, PA); "Gifts" (led by **Delores Friesen** of Iowa City, IA); and "A Diet for the Mind" (led by **Hope Lind** of Eugene, OR).

Forthcoming Reports will focus on:

July-Aug. 1983	Ten-Year Celebration of the Committee on Women's Concerns, compiled by Margaret Loewen Reimer, <i>Mennonite Reporter</i> , Waterloo, Ont. N2L 3G6.
Sept.-Oct. 1983	Women and Non-Traditional Churches, compiled by Janice Kreider, 4090 W. 31st Ave., Vancouver, B.C. V6S 1Y6.
Nov.-Dec. 1983	Women and Aging, compiled by Muriel Thiessen Stackley, 4830 Woodland Ave., Lincoln, NE 68516.
Jan.-Feb. 1984	Women and Home Missions, compiler Lois Barrett, 1805 Frances, Elkhart, IN 46516 (not yet confirmed).
March-Apr. 1984	Women and Third World Development, compiler Joy Hofer, MCC, 21 S. 12th St., Akron, PA 17501.
May-June 1984	Impact of Childbearing/Childlessness on Women's Lives, compiled by Sue Clemmer Steiner, Apt. 3, 87 Westmount Rd. N., Waterloo, Ont. N2L 5G5.

The *REPORT* is published bi-monthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. It strives to promote this belief through sharing information, concerns and ideas relating to problems and issues which affect the status of women in church and society. Correspondence should be addressed to Editor Sue Clemmer Steiner, Apt. 3, 87 Westmount Rd. North, Waterloo, Ontario N2L 5G5 Canada.

To subscribe or change your address, please send your old address with your new address to: MCC, 21 South 12th Street, Akron, PA 17501. Allow 2-4 weeks for address change. Contributions welcome.

**MCC**

Mennonite  
Central  
Committee



21 South 12th Street  
Akron  
Pennsylvania  
U.S.A.  
17501

**Address  
correction  
requested**